



LESSONS for LIFE
Taking flight Part IV
THE EAGLE
January 25, 2009 11:00am
Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: ISAIAH 40: 29 - 31
Gospel: MARK 6: 7 - 9

During this month of January we had a sermon series and the theme scripture for the series was John 10:10. Where Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly," offering to us this gift of abundant life. The title for this series is Taking Flight. So, how do we as individuals take flight? How are we able to experience this abundant life in the midst of the challenges we face? As a church, how do we experience this abundant life? How do we also take flight?

We began the first Sunday looking at the butterfly. We learned about the need for personal transformation. We learned about the need for us to take a look inside and to see what needs to be transformed or changed. We learned that just like the caterpillar entering the cocoon, we have all the DNA we need to make the transformation we don't need to look to someone outside, we have all that we need, we are ready to make that transformation. We also learned that it is part of the of the butterfly's work is to share its beauty even when it doesn't see it and how we are also to share our beauty with the world.

Week two we took a look at the airplane. For centuries, many folks thought that it was impossible for people to ever fly. Yet when we face the impossible, when we take on that which we deem to be impossible in our lives, miracles can happen.

Last week we took a look at ski jumpers. We talked about how people who become expert in their field, on average, world experts spend 10 thousand hours in training. The importance of training, of commitment and of discipline; to be able to take flight and at some point, the need to go down that ski jump and take off, the need to get out of the boat and to walk on water. We are looking at these issues both personally in terms of some skills that we can gain and also as a church. How can we take flight as a church? The transformations we may need to make, the knowledge we already have here, the resources that we need to move to the next stage in our journey; to

share our beauty with the world; to take on what we may think to be impossible as a church, to put in the hard work and discipline and to get out of the comfortable boat or comfortable pew.

Today is the final week in the series and we are taking a look at the eagle for some lessons. Just a few facts: Eagles can live from twenty to thirty years in the wild; in captivity they have been known to live up to fifty years. There are many, many different varieties and they stay comfortably in the nest for the first eleven to twelve weeks until they are taught to fly. Then, they for another month or two they hang around while they perfect their flying and eating skills. They are very strong. They have keen eye sight. They can see a rabbit from two miles away. They generally mate for life. They can fly up to 100 miles an hour. They have, each eagle has 7000 feathers. We want to show you some clips of some eagles beginning with a baby eagle, sort of cute, then taking a look at a mom with two baby eagles in the nest just getting ready to teach them to fly, then again, an eagle with a baby eagle and the next one the eagle is giving a lecture to the little baby eagle, telling him a thing or two. Next a baby eagle in a nest way up high which is their trend, to build their nests very high. Then, we see eagles beginning to take flight and flying in the air, next we see two eagles flying together, which is unusual as eagles generally are loners and fly by themselves. Next, three show you the majesty and strength of eagles, not a lot of flapping wings here, but soaring to heights using the winds to help them.

This week I was on my treadmill, which is my main spot of inspiration, at home, I was exercising, and I got an idea, so I took a piece of paper off one of those tear-off-calendars, which I hate, please do not ever give me one, (laughter) and I use them for scrap paper, I tore one off and I was going to write something down and I thought oh, oh, maybe I should read it to see what the quote is this was on Wednesday of this week. This is the quote that was on the sheet: *A dream is a stilled shadow until it takes flight and then one day with the strength of an eagle, it soars.* Now I am not saying that God put that sheet on that... but I am saying that it really spoke to me, and it was an affirmation that we are on the right track with this series.

There are twenty seven countries that have the eagle as part of their national symbol. The symbol for John the Apostle includes an eagle. Many sports clubs around the world include an eagle as part of their symbol. What is it about the eagle? When I started this sermon series frankly I didn't really like eagles very much. I was really looking forward to talking about how the American eagle is a loner and how the Canadian geese all fly together as a group and have this team thing down, I wanted to talk about foreign policy... but I thought I won't do that and I will stay to my script (laughter). But what is it about the eagle? By the end of this research, I became fond and respectful of the eagle. We heard in the reading from Isaiah, God tell us that those who wait upon God they shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings like eagles. Even before that in the Book of Exodus God says, I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to my self. Thirty-eight times in the bible, it talks to us about eagles. Eagles and eagle symbolism goes across a wide variety of beliefs. In Ancient Egypt the eagle was the symbol of the sun, and the Great Spirit. In many

Christian churches the Bible is placed on a podium with eagle's wings holding it up. The Egyptians used the eagle as a messenger to the gods. The Romans used the eagle as a sign of power and to the Greeks the eagle was a messenger to the Greek god Zeus; and Zeus took the form of an eagle when he carried his young lover Ganymede to Mount Olympus. In native traditions on many of the continents, eagles are seen as symbols of inner work, understanding and the balance between heaven and earth.

So, I want us to take a look at what some of the lessons are that we might learn from eagles. As you go through this it is quite astounding when you think of the lessons for us as individuals and as a church. First, sometimes we have to do hard work alone. Sometimes we need to make tough decisions, make changes and carry burdens alone. Not always are there the folks around us to strengthen us, sometimes we have to do it by ourselves. Secondly, the strength of an eagle reminds us to build up our own spiritual strength particularly in good times. Many of us, too many of us in the midst of good times forget about growing spiritually and only reach for spiritual strength in difficult times. We need to build up our strength, spiritually so we are able to handle the strong winds and the difficult moments.

Thirdly, an eagle, when it is out in nature, free, is one of the cleanest birds, but when it is placed in captivity it becomes one of the dirtiest of birds. The reality is that when we become enslaved, whether it is enslavement to other people's opinions, whether it is enslavement to an addiction or a fear, it is not pretty. To be able to achieve our full potential we have to take an honest look at what enslaves us.

Fourthly, the female eagle, when she is being courted, because they generally mate for life, so this is an important decision, when the male eagle starts to court the female eagle, she doesn't just sort of give in immediately but she tests the male eagle. What she will do is she will take a little twig and will fly up and drop the twig and she will see if the male will be able to swoop down and catch the twig before it falls to the ground. If it does he moves to phase two of the test (Laughter) where she will fly higher and drop another twig to see if he will pick it up... and a third time and then by the fourth time she will fly as high as she can and drop the twig. If in these four times in a row the male eagle succeeds in getting the twig, then it has passed the test.

Some of us get into relationships way too fast. Some of us need to spend a little more time testing; commitment and the relationship before we jump into it. Because we jump into it so fast and if it is not a healthy relationship for us then we have the pain of separation and starting anew. So, I would just ... now I am not thinking about anyone in particular this morning, I would just encourage you to think of that female eagle and spend a little bit of time testing relationships before you jump in too quickly. I should move on... (Laughter)

Fifth, the eagle is the only bird that will fly into a storm. Whenever a thunderstorm is coming all other birds find shelter or fly away the eagle will fly into the storm because

it knows that it can use the winds of a storm to fly even higher, it knows that its strength will carry it through.

I don't believe that God sends storms to test you, but I do believe that we can have confidence if storms come in our lives that we can use those storms to grow, to mature, to gain strength and we can have confidence that we will be able to handle any of the storms that come at us.

Number six, when the eagle starts to reach an elderly age, it will go off by itself, find a quiet place and it goes through a process of tearing all of the feathers from its body, all of the broken ones and all of the good ones, all of the feathers are torn off. It is a painful process and a bloody process. The eagle remains there until new feathers grow so it has fresh new feathers to be able to move into that last phase of its life and be able to continue to soar to new heights. There are times in our lives, if we are going to move forward, that we need to let go of some of the patterns and habits in our lives. Maybe some of those things have served us well to get us to a certain point, maybe they haven't. But those times of reflection and those times of letting go are important to move on.

Number seven, the eagle; and generally I thought of this as being only for mother eagles, but one of the sites we researched said it happens with father eagles, but predominantly for the mother eagles, there comes a point about eleven or twelve weeks when it is time to teach the little baby eagles to fly. So the mother will either stir up the nest so much that the baby eagles are pushed out or deliberately push them out of the nest so that they are free falling, so they start flapping away and often don't get it down, can't fly, then the mother will swoop under and catch the baby eagle, take it back to the nest let it catch its breath and then push it out of the nest again and will do this a number of times until the baby eagle learns how to fly.

You know sometimes in our lives we get so comfortable in a particular nest; in a particular pattern that we are in. Sometimes things have to get stirred up to get us out of that pattern so that we are able to fly to new heights. Sometimes we are even pushed out when we don't like it. I know down through the years those of you who have been around the church for a while will recall times when you have felt that I have been pushing too much, that I have wanted new programs or new things to happen too quickly well, this morning I am going to risk a little bit and push you out of the nest.

I remember a wonderful story of a United Church Minister when she had been in her parish about six months, she was always a nervous, new parish new church and the patriarch of the congregation came to her one Sunday and said, "Reverend, I am not coming to church anymore." Her heart sank, "I am not being fed anymore, here in this church." ... And she said, "Well, maybe it is time you to take of the bib and put on the apron." (Laughter)

I believe that there is the bib period, I believe that yes, sometimes people come to the church and need to have the bib on for a while, they need to be fed for a while; however, that aura soon goes away, and that the healthiest period is when you take off your bib and you put on your apron because it is in giving that we give that we receive.

So, during this campaign, we have been talking about volunteering your time and pledging your financial support. We are so thankful for the folks who have already come forward; we have been very moved by that. So I want to push you out of the nest this morning to say to you that all of us can find some time to help, whether it is on Sunday when you are here anyway or coming in during the week, or somewhere. I encourage you to take that volunteer form to complete it and Carol Newman and her team will meet with you and find the right place. But I am encouraging you to get out of the nest, or the comfortable pew.

Also in terms of the financial support, seventy eight something like that people have already responded and we are very, very thankful for that generous, generous support of the work that we are doing together; however, we haven't heard from most of you. I know for many, the economic times, the crisis, or the bills, or my partner will get upset with me, but I want to stir up the nest a little bit this morning. Here are two coffee cups, from one of my favorite coffee shops. Together they come to just under five dollars. I am not asking you to give up coffee. I am just saying how easy it is to do this, to think about five dollars a week. Or if you smoke cigarettes, (Laughter) now this is a little pack, if it were a big pack it would be just under ten dollars. I am not asking you today, to give up smoking but what I am saying is ... you find the resources to do this, I ask you also to find the resources to do this. So, today as you take a look at that form I am asking you to seriously think about completing it before you leave. ...And whether it is five dollars a week or ten dollars a week whatever you feel is right for you to make a start... and you don't have to become a 'sustainer'; for some folks that is a hurdle that is a little bit difficult to get over, that automatic withdrawal thing, you can just say, I will give this amount when I am here and I will try to catch up when I am not, and give us an indication of your support.

Number eight, the eagle waits for the right time to fly. Test the winds. If you have an important decision to make in your life, I would encourage you to take the time that you need in order to make that decision, to seek out guidance and wisdom from those around you and not to jump too quickly into difficult or challenging decisions. Those who wait upon God, wait upon God shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles.

Finally, the eagle can fly the highest. So what is it that this church needs to do to fly higher than we have ever flown before? Jesus, in the Gospel reading called the disciples and he sent them out two by two to do work and he gave them authority over unclean spirits. That is how God works. God predominantly works in our world through people. God wants to work in our world through you. You are here for a

reason; to make this world a better place; to make this world a better place for those who will come after us. So I encourage you to find what that place is for you.

This has been a week of dream sharing, Martin Luther King's I have a dream, the new President's and his dream for the world. I want to conclude this morning by sharing with you a little piece of my dream for this church. I dream of a church empowered by the spirit of God, that we make decisions wisely, trusting God's spirit. I dream of a church empowered by a spirit of unity, empowered by a spirit of sacrifice, empowered by a spirit of generosity a spirit of service, and a spirit of joy. I dream of a church of reconciliation loving our enemies into friends. I dream of a church building bridges; I dream of a church that is leading our people to faith here and around the world.

We conclude this series today, taking flight. How can you experience the abundant life God wants for you? What are the decisions that you need to make in your life to be able to make the transformation that is ahead of you? How can you help us collectively to fly higher, to new heights, becoming the church that God wants us to be? It is time to test your wings. Yeah it might seem safer to sit on the ground, to sit in the pew but I challenge you this morning that sitting in the pew and looking up you are only going to see a piece of the sky that is before you, but when you soar to new heights you will see a new perspective and you will see even more of the goodness and glory and the majesty of the creation that God has placed before you. Why settle for just the current piece of the sky you know? It is time to take flight, folks, it is time to take flight, church.

Amen.